

THE PERSIAN EMPIRE

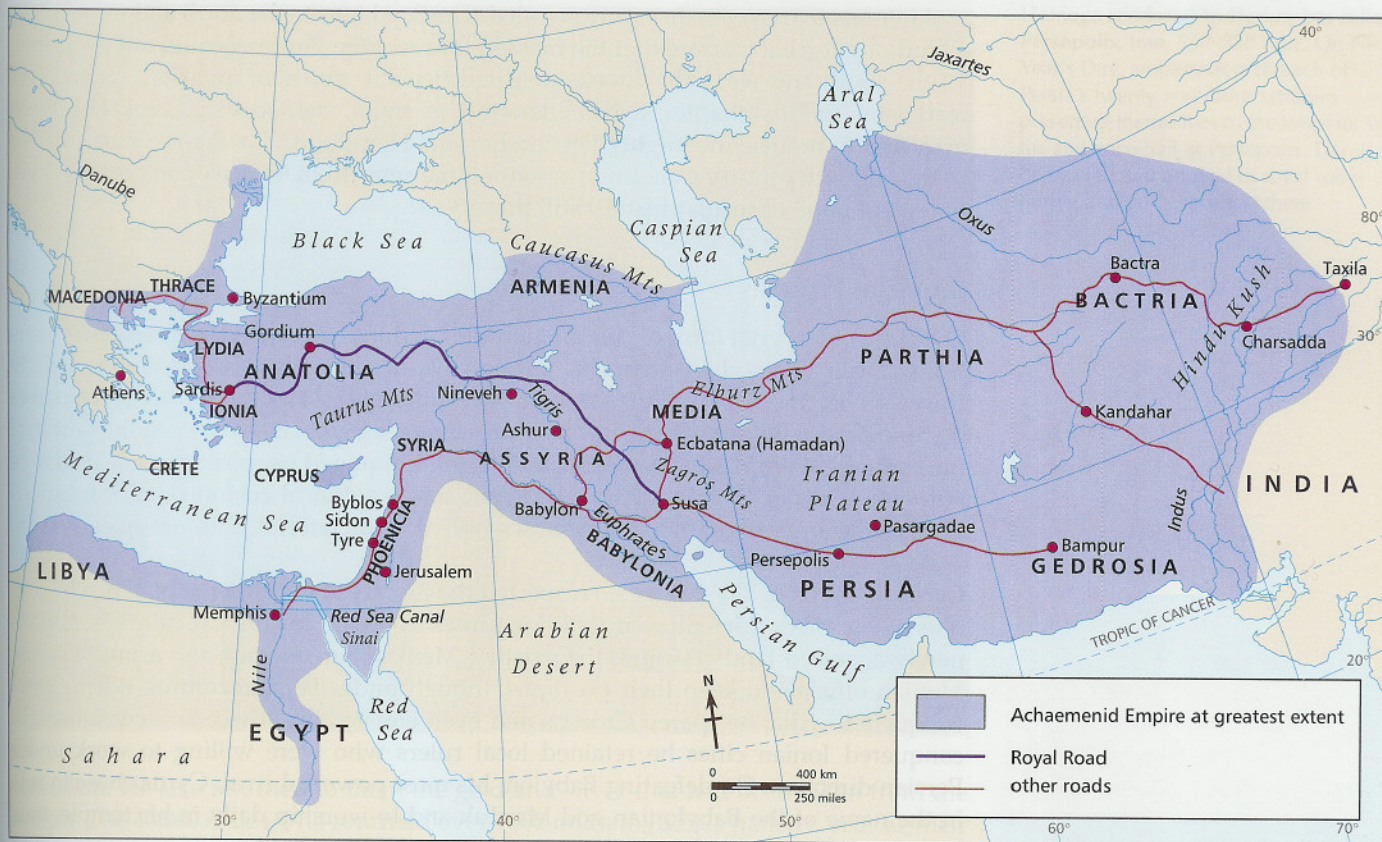
Medes and Persians began to appear in the region east of Mesopotamia about 1300 B.C.E., bringing with them the use of iron. Written cuneiform records of the mid-ninth century B.C.E. confirm the archaeological evidence of their arrival. At first the Medes were more numerous and powerful, but later the Persians came to predominate. Like the Hittites, both groups were Indo-Europeans—that is, in language and cultural heritage they were related to some of the same major groups who came to inhabit Europe and northern India.

Cyaxares of Media (r. 625–585 B.C.E.) established an army; conquered the Scythians, another immigrant group in the region; sealed an alliance with the Babylonians by marrying his granddaughter to the son of their ruler; and, together with them, captured Nineveh, the capital of Assyria. They destroyed Assyria as a major military force, and a new **balance of power** among the Egyptians, Medes, Babylonians, and Lydians emerged in western Asia.

Persian Expansion

Cyrus II, the Great, of Persia (r. 558–529 B.C.E.), however, broke the balance when he defeated the other three kingdoms of western Asia and incorporated them into his own empire. He conquered, first, the Medes in 550; then, in 546, the Lydians with their king, the fabulously wealthy Croesus; and finally, in 539, the Babylonians. Under Cyrus, the Achaemenids (named in honor of their legendary ancestor Achaemenes) dominated the entire region from Persia to the Mediterranean.

The story of Cyrus' greatest conquest, his capture of the city of Babylon, also has larger-than-life qualities. Cyrus' legend had grown so great that the Babylonians



welcomed their new foreign king without even giving battle. Cyrus was also careful to observe the principal ritual of the Babylonian New Year festival, showing honor to the statue of Bel-Marduk, the king of the Babylonian gods. Herodotus' story of Cyrus' death is also of legendary proportions. In conquering the Massagetai nomads, Cyrus killed the son of the woman who ruled them, and the young man committed suicide. The mother swore revenge and ultimately killed Cyrus. This legend is, however, not consistent with the more illustrious story of Cyrus' death in battle. According to this, Cyrus was killed in battle in 529 B.C.E., defending his empire against attacks from the north by a nomadic group of Scythians led by their queen Tomyris.

His eldest son, Cambyses II (r. 529–522 B.C.E.), expanded Cyrus' conquests. Crossing the Sinai Desert, he captured Memphis, the capital of Egypt, and carried its pharaoh back to Susa in captivity, thus completing the conquest of all of the major powers that had influenced the Middle East. Egypt frequently revolted, and large garrisons were required to keep it under control, so the Achaemenids under Darius I (r. 522–486 B.C.E.) completed a canal across the desert, connecting the Nile River and the Red Sea. This early "Suez Canal," first envisioned by the Egyptians as a trade route, became a troop supply line for Persian control over Egypt.

Darius also extended the Persian Empire more deeply into the Indian subcontinent, as far as the Indus River. The Achaemenids now controlled some of the most valuable trade routes in Asia; the **satrapy**, or province, of "India" submitted one-third of the annual cash receipts of the Achaemenids, and Indian troops served in the Achaemenid armies. From this time, Indian- and Persian-based powers would regularly confront one another across the borders of what are today Afghanistan and Pakistan. Meanwhile, in the west, Darius expanded onto the fringes of Europe, capturing Thrace and Macedonia, and bringing the Persian Empire to its greatest extent.

Achaemenid Persia. The Medes and the Persians were united under Cyrus the Great in 550 B.C.E. to form the Achaemenid or Persian Empire. Cyrus and his successors, notably Darius and Xerxes, extended the empire to the Indus in the east and to Egypt and Libya in the west, and twice invaded Greece.

satrapy A province or colony in the Achaemenid or Persian Empire ruled by a satrap or governor. Darius I completed the division of the Empire into provinces, and established 20 satrapies with their annual tributes. The term satrapy can also refer to the period of rule of a satrap.

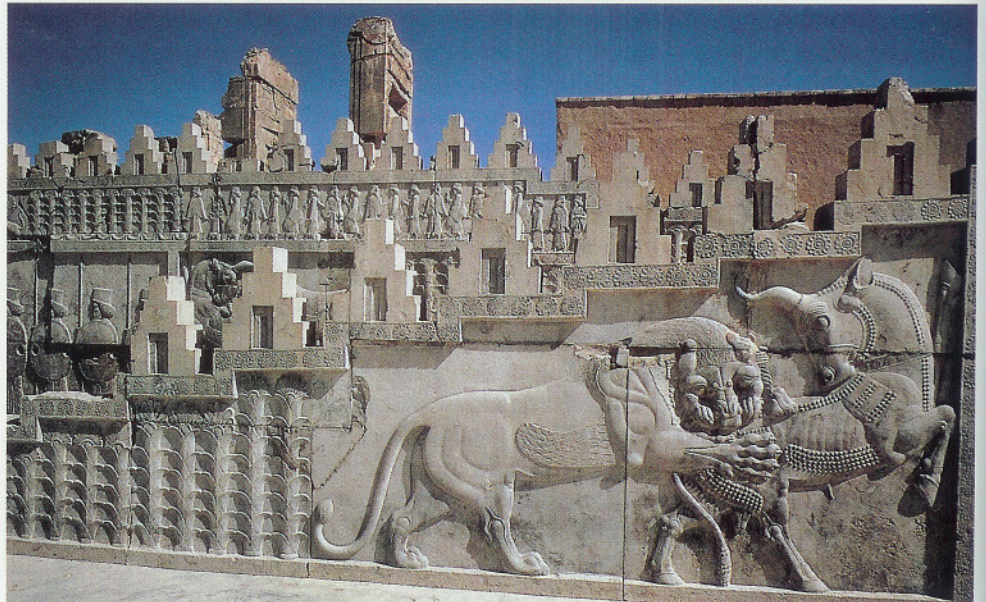
Attempts to move further were stymied. The Scythians to the north and west fought a kind of guerrilla warfare that the massed forces of the Persians could not overcome. To the south and west, the Greeks defeated Persian armies of invasion. As you will read later in this chapter, a confederation of small, democratic, Greek city-states managed to repulse the mighty Persian Empire. Herodotus' *The Persian Wars*, written in the late fifth century B.C.E. and presenting the story from a Greek perspective, is the first great book of secular history still preserved.

Imperial Policies

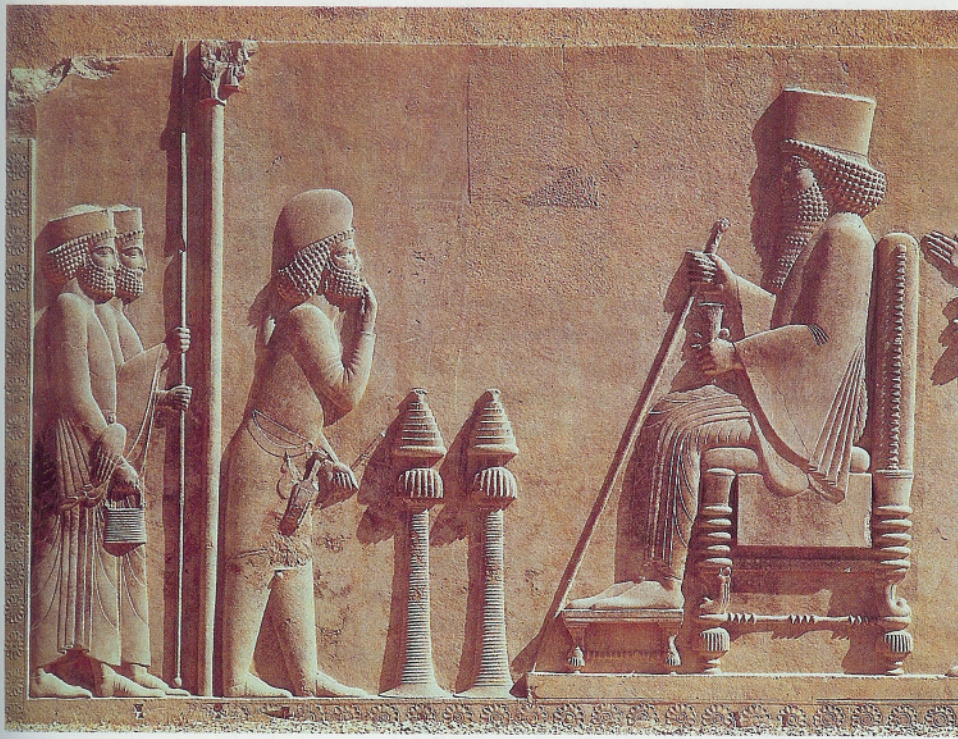
The Persian imperial form of rule and administration changed in the three generations from Cyrus II, its chief architect, through his son and successor Cambyses II, to Darius I, its most powerful emperor. The differences among the three emperors became especially clear in their policies for achieving a balance between the power of the central government and the desire of local, conquered peoples for some degree of autonomy. Under Cyrus and Darius, Persia respected local customs and institutions even as the empire expanded. Cambyses was more dictatorial, and met an early end.

Cyrus II. Cyrus (r. 558–529 B.C.E.) respected the dignity of his opponents. When he conquered the Medes, he allowed their king to escape with his life. He administered his newly acquired lands through the existing Median bureaucracy and army, allowing Median officials to keep their positions, though under Persian control. When Cyrus conquered Lydia, he spared Croesus and even enlisted his advice as a consultant. In conquered Ionian cities he retained local rulers who were willing to work under Persian direction. On defeating Babylon, his most powerful rival, Cyrus chose to rule in the name of the Babylonian god Marduk and to worship daily in his temple, thus keeping the support of the priests. He continued to employ local bureaucrats and to protect and secure the trade routes that brought wealth to the empire and secured the loyalty of the merchant classes.

Perhaps most strikingly, Cyrus allowed the peoples that Babylonia had captured and deported to return to their homes. For example, he permitted the Jewish community of exiles in Babylon to return home to Judaea and to rebuild their temple in



Lion killing a bull, bas relief, Persepolis, Iran, 550–330 B.C.E. The great palace complex of Persepolis, encompassing many smaller palaces within it, was designed as the central symbol of Darius' empire. Construction began in 518 B.C.E. and took some seventy years to complete. Scenes such as this bas relief of a lion killing a bull seem to emerge from Achaemenid mythology, which read the signs of the zodiac, Leo following Taurus, as representing the end of the old year and the coming of the new.



Homage rendered to Darius, bas relief, Persepolis, Iran, 550–330 B.C.E. On New Year's Day, ambassadors of each of Persia's twenty and more satrapies presented themselves to the emperor in his audience hall at Persepolis. Darius, bejeweled and arrayed in royal robes of purple and gold, received them.

Jerusalem. He also returned to them the gold and silver that had been taken from the temple. The 40,000 exiles who returned over 1000 miles to Judaea hailed Cyrus as their political savior and kept their renewed state loyal to the Persian Empire.

Cambyses II. Unlike his father, Cambyses II (r. 529–522 B.C.E.) seems to have lost sight of the need for restraint in both the expansion and the administration of his empire. His conquest of Egypt and his use of Egyptians in his own administration of that land followed Cyrus' model, but then he overextended his reach. His attempted campaign against the Phoenician city of Carthage in distant north Africa failed when Phoenician sailors in his own navy refused to fight. An army sent south from Egypt to Nubia, attempting to capture its fabled gold supplies, failed to reach its destination and retreated from the desert in tatters. Cambyses may not have been emotionally stable, and it was rumored that he kicked to death his pregnant wife/sister. When he died, as he was returning to Persia to put down an insurrection, it was further rumored that he had committed suicide. His seven-year rule had been costly to Persia.

Darius I. Darius (r. 522–486 B.C.E.), a general in the Persian army and prince of the Achaemenid dynasty, succeeded to the throne by murdering Bardiya (r. 522), who ruled briefly after Cambyses. Darius ruled for thirty-five years. He was more deliberate, more balanced, and more capable as an administrator than Cambyses, and he became much richer as emperor than either of his predecessors. Like Cyrus, he used local administrators to staff local governments. He sought to create smaller, more efficient units of government by increasing the number of administrative units, or satrapies, even faster than he expanded the empire. Some of the regional administrators, or satraps, were local elites; some were Persian. In each satrapy, loyalty to the empire was assured by the presence of Persian army units, which reported directly back to the king, and by a secretary, who monitored the actions of the satrap and also reported back to Persia.

Darius commissioned the design of the first written Persian script. He established the tradition that royal inscriptions were to be trilingual—in Old Persian, Babylonian, and Elamite. Among these inscriptions were those on the Behistun stone, a proclamation of Darius' ascent to power, that twenty-three centuries later became the key to unlocking cuneiform writing. In the midst of the multitude of languages used across the empire, these were to be the official written languages of administration. The most widely spoken public language was Aramaic, however, and this language of the common people throughout much of the eastern Mediterranean greatly influenced the development of formal Persian.

Legal codes varied among the satrapies to reflect local usage, and the Persian rulers frequently codified and recorded these laws. They rationalized tax codes. They evaluated, measured, and recorded the size and productivity of agricultural fields, and fixed the tax rate at about 20 percent. In each satrapy a Persian collector gathered the various taxes—on industry, mining, ports, water, commerce, and sales. The satraps remitted most of the revenues to Persia, but some were retained locally for administrative and development expenses.

Darius built, maintained, and guarded an imperial system of roads, the most famous of which was a 1700-mile royal road, stretching from his capital at Susa to Sardis across Anatolia (but not quite reaching the Mediterranean). Along these roads he established a series of inns for travelers and a royal courier service with stations at about every 15 miles. He completed the construction of the Nile–Red Sea canal, which the Egyptians themselves had abandoned.

To increase agricultural production, Darius renewed the irrigation systems of Mesopotamia, and encouraged the introduction of new crops from one part of the empire to another. He standardized the empire's gold coinage, and permitted only his own imperial mints to strike the official coinage, the gold daric, in his name. Agriculture and commerce flourished, and not only for the benefit of the wealthy. Craftsmen produced goods for everyday use—leather sandals, cheap cloth, iron implements and utensils, and pottery—in increasing quantities.

Substantial sums of the enormous wealth of the flourishing empire went to the construction of four capital cities. The most sumptuous and lavish of them, and the one most Persian in style, was built by Darius and named "Parsa," Persia. The Greeks later called it "Persepolis," the city of the Persians.

Symbols of Power

Although the records of ancient Persia speak of painting as one of its arts, little has been found. Our greatest knowledge of Persian art comes from imperial architecture and design, most especially at Persepolis. The outstanding architectural monument in this capital was a fortified citadel that held ceremonial and administrative buildings. Immediately below it was a large complex of residential palaces, probably the homes of the court.

Alexander and subsequent conquerors looted and burned the city, and the dominant remains today are forests of 60-foot high columns, which have survived to indicate the grandeur of the city at its height. The largest and highest of all the remaining structures in the palace is the audience hall of Darius. Its façade is covered by creatures—lions, bulls, and griffins—asserting the power of the emperor and intimidating visitors. These visitors—many of them representatives from Persia's subject lands come to pay their respects in a procession before the emperor—are immortalized in bas reliefs on the façades of the building and its stairways. The array of reliefs suggests the imperial power of Persia over its empire, and yet a place of honor seems to have been found for each of the delegates.

In accordance with the political theory that had evolved in imperial Persia, the emperor legally possessed all the property of the realm as well as the power of life and death over his subjects. Darius did not, however, choose to become a god. He was probably a follower of the religion of the teacher Zarathustra, or Zoroaster as the Greeks called him. Zoroastrian scriptures date him to about 600 B.C.E., although modern scholarship places him as much as 1000 years earlier. In a series of hymns, called *Gathas*, Zoroaster described a conflict between Ahuramazda, the god of goodness and light, and Ahriman, who embodied the forces of evil and darkness. Individuals had to choose between them and they would be rewarded or punished for their choice on a final day of judgment. The *Avesta*, a later, fuller book of Zoroastrian scripture, further elaborated on the concept of an afterlife and the resurrection of the dead. Although, like Cyrus, Darius did not impose his own religious beliefs on the peoples he conquered, Zoroastrianism, with its roots in Persia, did spread rapidly under his rule. Darius also tried to soften the imposition of imperial administration and tax collection by maintaining local traditions and by enlisting local elites to serve in his administration. Like Cyrus, Darius managed to balance imperial majesty with local autonomy. At the western end of his empire, however, his neighbors and rivals, the Greeks, fought back against his attempts to rule over them.

THE GREEK CITY-STATES

The Greek city-states had deep historic roots of their own. Long before the Persian Empire, civilizations had risen and fallen on the Greek peninsula, its neighboring islands, and the island of Crete in the eastern Mediterranean Sea. Archaeological excavations show that for some five hundred years in Greece and for a thousand in Crete, local, brilliant, urban civilizations had flourished.

The Greek Polis: Image and Reality

By the time the Persian emperor Darius I began to conquer the Greek city-states of western Anatolia (present-day Turkey), the Greeks had developed a very different form of political organization from that of the Persian imperial structure. The Greek city-state, or polis, was an intentionally small, locally organized government based on a single central city with enough surrounding land to support its agricultural needs. Most of the city-states had populations of a few thousand, with only the very largest of them exceeding 40,000 people.

Geography and topography played a large part in limiting the size of the Greek city-state. In and around the Greek peninsula, mountains, rivers, and seas had kept the units of settlement rather small and isolated. (To the north, where farmland was more expansive, as it was in Macedonia, geographically larger states developed within such

centralized city capitals.) When a region could no longer support an expanding population, it hived off colonies to new locations. Most of the Greek city-states in Anatolia seem to have originated as colonial settlements of older cities on the Greek mainland, part of an array of Greek city-states that spread throughout the Mediterranean coast, extending as far west as present-day Marseilles in France and Catalonia in Spain. Although separate and usually independent politically, the city-states were united culturally by the use of the Greek language, a myth-history centered on the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* of the poet Homer, and such festivals as the Olympic games, held every four years after 776 B.C.E.

The physical design of a Greek polis told much about its origins, functions, and ideals. Many cities were built on hillsides, at least partly for defense, but also partly because of the mountainous geography of Greece. As the city rose, with each level upward its functions and architecture became more exalted. At the bottom were the houses of the common people, built simply from local materials of stone and mud, with little concern for architectural merit. Private dwellings were relatively plain; the fine art and architecture went into public buildings.

Further up the hill was the **agora**, or civic and market center, with clusters of buildings for trade in goods, ideas, and political maneuvers. These public buildings were more elegant, designed for greater comfort and show. Nearby were gymnasia for exercise and competition. The *agora* and gymnasia demonstrated the value the Greeks placed on public life and physical prowess and discipline. Further off, built into the side of the hill, was an amphitheater where plays were regularly performed, often representing scenes from Greek mythological history and suggesting their significance in understanding the moral issues of the day. In the city of Athens, at the top of the hill, on the Acropolis ("city on high"), surrounded by a wall, were the chief temples of the city, especially the shrine to the goddess Athena who was considered the divine guardian of the city.

Athens and the Development of Democracy

Each polis developed its own form of government. Councils of nobles governed some cities, while others fell under the rule of a single powerful individual. We recount the fate of the city of Athens, in particular, for three reasons: It was a leader among the Greek city-states; it gave birth to the modern concept of political democracy; and it has left us the most historical records. Of all the major cities of Greece—for example, Sparta, Corinth, Thebes, and Syracuse—Athens seems to have moved farthest from rule by kings and oligarchies in the direction of rule by the people, democracy.

In 600 B.C.E., Solon (c. 630–c. 560 B.C.E.), who had risen to high office as a general and a poet, ended the monopoly over public office held by the Athenian hereditary aristocracy. He opened to all free men participation and voting in the decision-making public assembly, although only those meeting certain income levels could be elected to high public office. The Council of Four Hundred, which Solon also created, represented the interests of the wealthy and noble factions, while the assembly balanced them with the voices of more common men. Perhaps more importantly, Solon canceled all public and private debts, and abolished the practice of enslaving people to pay off their debts.

Solon's reforms crumbled when he left office, and decades of struggle between rich and poor and between men of different hereditary clans ensued until about 550 B.C.E., when Peisistratus seized control of the government as a "tyrant," the Greek term for a one-man autocratic ruler. Peisistratus (d. 527 B.C.E.) fostered economic growth through loans to small farmers; export promotion programs; road construction; and public works, including major building programs for the beautification of Athens and its



Two halves of a red-figure cup by the sculptor Douris, fifth century B.C.E. The figures depict four scenes from the education of a young man: learning to play the lyre and flute, and learning to read and write, all under the watchful eye of a pedagogue.



Acropolis. On Peisistratus' death, the city-state again fell into disarray and even civil war. In 510 B.C.E., at the invitation of a faction of Athenian noblemen, the king of Sparta, already Athens' greatest rival, invaded Athens, besieged the Acropolis, and deposed the descendants of Peisistratus.

Through all the warfare and strife, the ideals of Solon survived. A new ruler, Cleisthenes (c. 570–c. 508 B.C.E.), came to power as a tyrant and dramatically reorganized the city and its surrounding countryside. He did away with the aristocratic family centers of power by registering each Athenian as a citizen according to his geographical residence, or **deme**, in the city. Similarly, he reorganized the electoral districts of Attica, the region around Athens, into ten electoral units, creating new political identities and allegiances. The assembly resumed meeting about every ten days, and all male citizens

deme A rural district or village in ancient Greece, or its members or inhabitants. The demes were a constituent part of the polis but had their own corporations with police powers, and their own cults, officials, and property.

were expected to participate; 6000 were necessary for a quorum. Above the assembly, and setting its agenda, was a Council of Five Hundred, even more open than Solon's Council of Four Hundred had been, since members were selected from each deme, or neighborhood, for one-year terms by lottery, and members were not allowed to serve for more than two terms. In organizing themselves by deme, Athenians based their political identity on geographical residence in the city, not on heredity and kinship, nor on class and wealth.

This new concept of civic identity allowed the city to welcome new residents and the ideas they brought with them, regardless of their place of origin. It allowed people of different ethnic origins, even of enemy ethnic stocks, to enter the city, although they were not eligible for full citizenship, which was restricted to free men born in the deme. The human interaction in the small Greek city-state nurtured the intellect of its citizens. Life in the polis meant constant participation in a kind of ongoing public seminar. As Socrates (c. 470–399 B.C.E.), the leading philosopher of fifth-century Athens, said: "I'm a lover of learning, and trees and open country won't teach me anything, whereas men in the town do."

When Darius I's Persian Empire challenged the Greek city-states, Athens took the lead in forming a coalition against it. The contrast between the combatants was stark: city-state versus empire; local administration versus imperial power; evolving, decentralized democracy versus established, centralized imperial control. Persia was a huge, centrally governed empire; each Greek city-state was individually independent, although many had joined into regional confederations and leagues for mutual assistance and trade. A single emperor who set policies for the entire empire headed Persia; an assembly of all its adult, free, male citizens, for the most part, governed each individual Greek city-state. These assemblies passed laws, judged criminal and civil cases, provided for administration and implementation of legislation, and arranged for military defense as the need arose. The Greek city-states were moving toward democracy; they understood their legal systems to be their own creation and responsibility, neither ordained by the gods nor imposed by a powerful external emperor.



Greek trireme. The Greeks developed triremes (with three banks of oars) as warships and had them specially strengthened so that they could ram other ships. The triremes were slower and less maneuverable than the Persian ships. To compensate, the Greeks put soldiers aboard and, at Salamis, relied mostly on hand-to-hand combat.

War with Persia

Some of the Greek city-states in Anatolia had earlier fallen under Darius' empire. Although they were permitted to retain their own form of local government as long as they paid their taxes to Persia, some of them revolted and called on the Greek cities of the peninsula for help. Athens tried, half-heartedly and unsuccessfully, to assist its overseas relatives with ships and soldiers. According to Herodotus, Darius was furious at this interference. He ordered one of his servants to remind him, every day at dinnertime, "Master, remember the Athenians." In 490, Darius I dispatched a naval expedition directly across the Aegean to punish Athens for its part in the revolt in Anatolia.

War with the Persians tested the Greeks' fundamental mode of political organization. How could the tiny Greek city-states hold off Darius' imperial armies and keep their incipient democracies alive? First, they had the enormous advantage of being close to home, with a good knowledge of local geography and conditions. Second, the largest among them, especially Athens and Sparta, chose to cooperate in defense against a common enemy.

When the Persian fleet of 600 ships landed 48,000 soldiers at Marathon in 490 B.C.E., a force of some 10,000 Greek **hoplite** soldiers, joined by about 1000 soldiers from Plataea and another 1000 slaves, confronted them. The hoplite forces were deployed in solid phalanxes, columns of soldiers arrayed in tight lines, the left arm and shield of one man pressed against the right shoulder of the other, in row on row. If a soldier in the front row fell, one from the next line took his place. (In these hoplite formations, each individual soldier is crucial to the welfare of all. Many analysts have seen in this egalitarian military formation the rationale for Athenian political democracy.)

The discipline of the Athenians defeated their enemy. At the Battle of Marathon in 490 B.C.E., Persia lost 6400 men, Athens 192. The Athenian general sent his fastest runner, Pheidippides, racing back to Athens to tell of the victory at Marathon to strengthen the resolve of the Athenians at home and to hasten their preparations for battle against the surviving Persian forces. Pheidippides delivered the message, and died of exhaustion on the spot. (The marathon race of today is named for his 26-mile run.)

Xerxes I (r. 486–465 B.C.E.), Darius's son, succeeded him and mounted a renewed attack on the Greek mainland by land and sea in 480 B.C.E. Courageous resistance by the Spartan general Leonidas and his troops at Thermopylae cost the lives of all the defenders, but won time for the Athenians to evacuate their city and regroup their forces. Xerxes continued to push onward to Athens, capturing, burning, and plundering the city and its Acropolis, but the Athenian warriors had withdrawn to the nearby port of Piraeus and the Bay of Salamis. At Salamis, a force of some 1000 Persian ships confronted a much smaller fleet of some 300 Greek triremes, named for the three levels in which its approximately 170 rowers were arranged. One of Xerxes' most trusted naval advisers, Artemisia, a widowed queen among the people of Halicarnassus, and a captain of one of the ships, counseled waiting and watching. Xerxes, however, followed the majority and sailed into battle. The Athenians maneuvered the Persians into a bottleneck in the Salamis Channel and destroyed 200 of their ships while losing only 40. Xerxes sailed for home, and Persia never again attacked Greece by sea.

The Persians did, however, continue to fight by land. In 479 B.C.E., in alliance with their subjects in Macedonia and some northern Greeks, they prepared an army of some 100,000 men on the edge of the plains opening southward to Athens and the Peloponnese. Sparta and Athens formed an alliance with some other city-states to field an opposing army of about 40,000. Despite initial confusion in the ranks, the allied Spartan and Athenian forces destroyed the Persian armies and their camp, annihilated

the elite guard, and killed the leading Persian general. At about the same time, the Greek fleet defeated the surviving Persian fleet at Mycale, on the Ionian coast of Anatolia.

In the face of these losses, and with weaker leadership at home, Persia left Europe, never to return in such force. The small Greek city-states, led by arch-rivals Athens and Sparta, had shown an ability to combine in the face of a common enemy. They had demonstrated the virtues of small-scale, local units of society and the resilience of popular, democratic forms of government. Conversely, the Persians had exhibited one of the great flaws of empire: the tendency to overextend its powers.

Athens: from City-State to Mini-Empire

Ironically, the city-state of Athens, having led the Greeks in their struggle against the Persian Empire, subsequently began to construct an empire of its own. For purposes of the war, Athens had assembled its principal allies into the Delian League, with its council and treasury situated in Delos. At first, membership was voluntary, but soon Athens forbade withdrawal. When Naxos left the league in 470 B.C.E., the Athenians attacked the city, forced it to return, and terminated its independence. Other allies also revolted, usually because they could not meet Athens' demands for tribute and ships. As Athens continued to suppress these revolts, Thucydides reports, "the Athenians as rulers were no longer popular as they used to be."

By 461 B.C.E., many of the Greek city-states turned to Sparta to help them resist Athenian power. For ten years, from 461 to 451, Athens and its allies confronted Sparta and its allies in a series of intermittent battles sometimes called the First Peloponnesian War. During these wars Athens exploited its allies. In 454 B.C.E. the Athenians moved the treasury of the Delian League to Athens and appropriated its funds in order to create in the city a spectacular center of culture and grace. These self-serving actions antagonized its allies and precipitated further war with Sparta. Here we explore Athens, first in its brilliant century of splendor, and later in its wartime suffering and defeats.

Parthenon, Athens, 447–432 B.C.E. The Parthenon on the Athenian Acropolis was a temple dedicated to the goddess Athena, the city's patron-deity. It was built at the instigation of Pericles as a symbol of Athens' growing importance and represents, in architectural terms, the summit of classical Greek achievement.

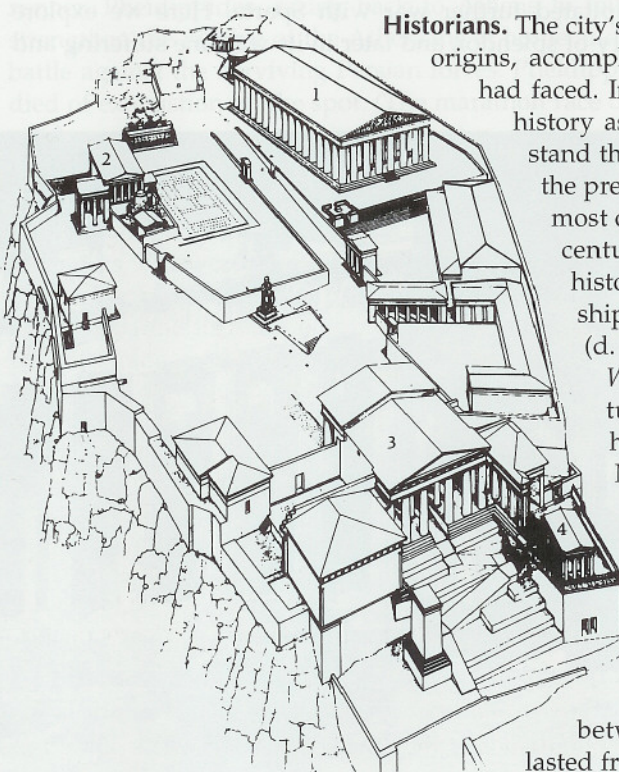


The Golden Age of Athenian Culture

Under the military and civic leadership of Pericles (c. 495–429 B.C.E.), Athenians took immense pride in their city-state, its democratic philosophy and artistic creativity. During the war years, the Persians had destroyed and burned much of Athens. When victory was secure, the Athenians began the rebuilding of their city.

Athens rose from a plain, and with each level upward its functions and architecture became more exalted. At the bottom were the houses of commoners, built simply from local materials of stone and mud, with little concern for architectural merit. Further up the hill was the *agora*, or civic and market center, with clusters of buildings for trade in goods, ideas, and political decision-making. These public buildings were more elegant, designed for greater comfort and show. In the splendor of the *agora* Athenians demonstrated the value placed on public life and on physical prowess and discipline. Nearby were gymnasia for exercise and competition. An amphitheater where plays were regularly performed was carved out of the hillside. At the top of the hill, on the Acropolis ("city on high"), surrounded by a wall, were the chief temples of the city, especially the shrine of the goddess Athena, the divine guardian of the city. Architects and urban designers Ictinus and Callicrates planned the new Acropolis and built the Parthenon, while the sculptor Phidias carved the friezes on the Parthenon and created a 40-foot-high statue of Athena, the city's patron goddess, to reside within it.

As the architectural projects flourished, Pericles founded a colony in southern Italy and took a fleet into the Black Sea. More important, he encouraged naval battles against Sparta and Corinth, as well as Persia, to promote his radical egalitarian democracy at home. Rowers typically were poorer than hoplites, but benefited from regular salaries and the spoils of war and empire. Eventually, he realized his strategy was flawed, concluding that his imperial ambitions threatened the very Athenian democracy he cherished.



Historians. The city's historians began to reflect on its origins, accomplishments, and the challenges it had faced. Indeed, the modern profession of history as a systematic attempt to understand the influence of past experience on the present began in Athens. Two of the most outstanding historians of the fifth century B.C.E. have given us the history of the city and its relationships with its neighbors. Herodotus (d. c. 420 B.C.E.) wrote *The Persian Wars*, and in the narrative recaptured a general, if anecdotal, history of the whole eastern Mediterranean and eastward as far as Persia and India from a Greek perspective. Thucydides (d. c. 401 B.C.E.), far more systematically and carefully, recounted the subsequent *History of the Peloponnesian War*, the war between Athens and Sparta that lasted from 431 B.C.E. until 404 B.C.E.

Philosophers. Philosophers such as Socrates and his student Plato introduced questions, methods of analysis and of teaching, and examinations of the purpose of life, which continue to command attention for their range and depth. Plato's prize student, Aristotle, later wrote that man is a "political animal," a creature of the city-state, and many of the key works in Greek history, drama, and philosophy explored the working of the city-state itself and the relationship of the individual to it.

For the philosopher Socrates (c. 470–399 B.C.E.), the Athenian state was father and mother; he derived his sense of self and purpose from the education the state gave him and from his continual debates with fellow citizens both in public and private. Socrates argued for the supremacy of the city-state over the individual. The citizen had obligations to the state for all the benefits he received from it, but had no rights to claim against the power of the state.

Socrates took philosophy personally and seriously. He opposed and satirized the **sophist** philosophers of his day who earned their salaries by training future statesmen how to argue any side of any question without necessarily staking any personal commitment. Through his incessant questions, he taught *his* students to be thoughtful but critical about the truths of others and about their own truths, and, after having reached their own conclusions, to live their own truths fully even if it meant their death, as it did for Socrates himself.

Plato (c. 428–348 B.C.E.) was Socrates' leading pupil and the founder of the Academy, which endured for centuries as Athens' leading school of philosophy. His philosophical works dealt with many topics, including love, justice, courage, and the nature of the state. Plato conceived of ideal situations, whether realistic or not. The ideal state, according to Plato, would be administered by a philosopher-king, who by virtue of innate good character and intensive training would know and do what was best for all citizens in the state. Similarly, Plato saw love ascending from the emotional and sexual passion for an individual to the contemplation of universal ideals.

Aristotle (384–322 B.C.E.), Plato's greatest pupil, addressed an astonishing array of subjects—logic, physics, astronomy, metaphysics, religion, rhetoric, literary criticism, and natural science—but he, too, devoted some of his most important writing to ethics and politics. His analysis of the principal forms of constitutional government in his *Politics* remains a useful introduction to the field even today. Aristotle later tutored Alexander the Great of Macedon, although that world-conqueror seems to have thoroughly rejected his teacher's argument for small units of government like the city-state: As Aristotle argued:

If the citizens of a state are to judge and to distribute offices according to merit, then they must know each other's characters; where they do not possess this knowledge, both the election to offices and the decision of lawsuits will go wrong. When the population is very large they are manifestly settled at haphazard, which clearly ought not to be. (*Politics* VII: 4; p. 326)

Dramatists. Drama developed and flourished in the theaters of Athens. The pursuit of justice, morality, and equity was a core theme. Athenian playwrights invented the



A marble, second-century-C.E. copy of the statue of Athena Parthenos, dedicated in 438 B.C.E. Phidias' 40-foot Athena, the divine guardian of the city, dominated the central chamber of the Parthenon on the Acropolis. This miniature Roman copy of the destroyed statue hardly suggests the glittering magnificence of the enormous gold-and-ivory original, a powerful symbol of the might of the goddess and her city, Athens. (Acropolis Museum, Athens)

dramatic forms of tragedy and comedy, and their most important plays all include themes related to the evolution of their city and its institutions.

The *Oresteia* trilogy by Aeschylus (525–456 B.C.E.) follows three generations of murders within the royal family of Atreus, as one act of revenge provokes the next, until finally, in a trial at Athens, Athena, patron goddess of the city, acquits Orestes, suggesting that divinely ordained vengeance will be replaced by human justice and the cycle of murder will be ended.

Oedipus Rex of Sophocles (c. 496–406 B.C.E.), perhaps the most famous single play of ancient Athens, centers on the family tragedy of Oedipus' murder of his own father, the king of Thebes, and his subsequent marriage to his own mother. (Oedipus, who had been abandoned as an infant and raised by shepherds, did not know that the man he killed was his father and that he had married his mother.) The play opens with the people of Thebes gathered round King Oedipus, before his tragedy is revealed, crying out for his help in arresting a plague that is afflicting the city. Oedipus' own moral corruption has brought the plague on the city, although that is revealed only later. Sophocles' *Antigone* confronts the conflict in loyalty to family versus loyalty to the city-state, as Antigone chooses to bury her brother, Polynices, despite the royal decree to leave his corpse unattended as an enemy of the state.

Euripides (480–406 B.C.E.) saw more clearly Athens' move toward imperialism, and criticized it in *The Trojan Women*. The hilarious, sexually explicit comedy, *Lysistrata*, by Aristophanes (c. 450–385 B.C.E.) portrays the women of Athens and Sparta agreeing to go on strike sexually until their men stop fighting the Peloponnesian Wars. As long as the men make war the women will not make love! The best of the Athenian dramatists addressed directly the political and social issues that confronted their city.

The Limits of City-State Democracy

Socrates' justification of the state demonstrates that even in the most democratic Greek city-state, government could exact respect and service from the citizen, but the citizen had few rights vis-à-vis the state. The citizen had the right, and indeed the obligation, to participate in the activities of the state and to serve the state, but not to have the state serve him.

For women, even the right of participation was absent. Women born of two Athenian parents were regarded as citizens, enjoyed some legal protection, and had responsibilities for performing certain religious rituals of great importance for the state. But,

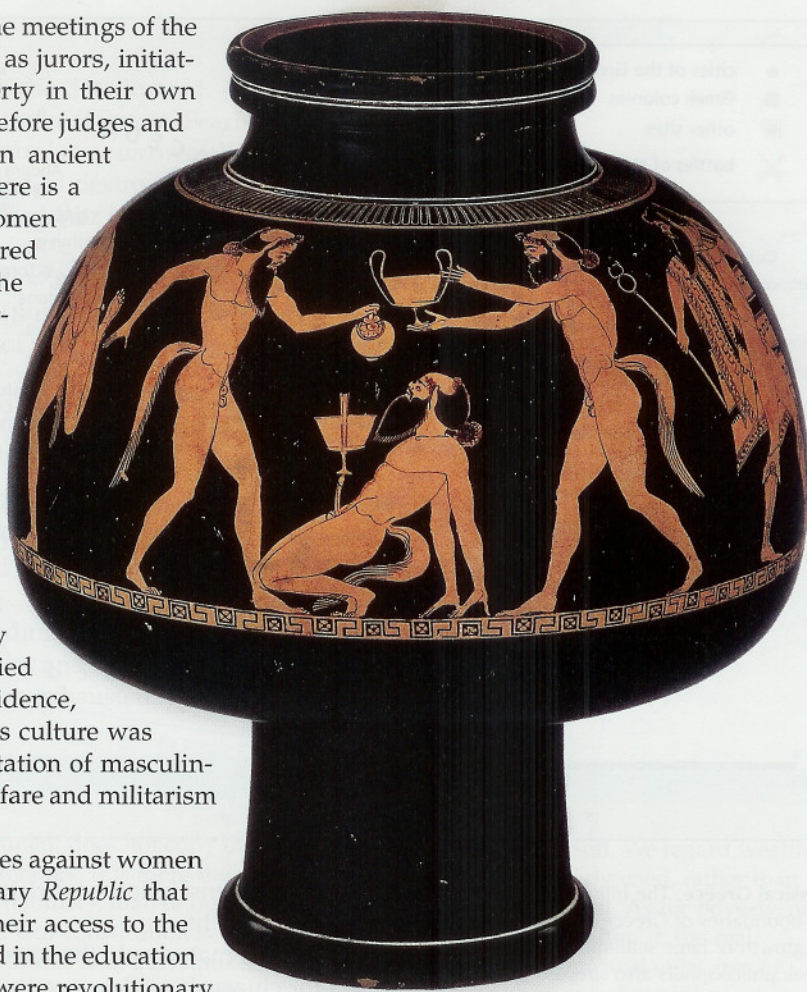
like slaves, they were excluded from attending the meetings of the assembly, holding annual public offices, serving as jurors, initiating legal cases on their own, or owning property in their own names. They had to have a man speak for them before judges and juries. Women's segregation from public life in ancient Greece perpetuated longstanding beliefs that there is a public sphere and a private sphere, and that women should be confined to the latter. Pericles captured this belief in his famous funeral oration, when he delivered this advice to the widows of fallen warriors: "Great will be your glory in not falling short of your natural character; and greatest will be hers who is least talked of among the men, whether for good or for bad."

Since many Greeks believed that true friendship was possible only among equals, many Greek men sought relationships, including sexual relationships, with other men outside their households, even when they held their marriages in high esteem. Greek vases, especially those used in male drinking parties, often carried paintings that glorified the phallus. Given this evidence, some feminist historians have concluded that this culture was misogynistic—hating women—and that the exaltation of masculinity could have been at the root of the constant warfare and militarism of ancient Greek society.

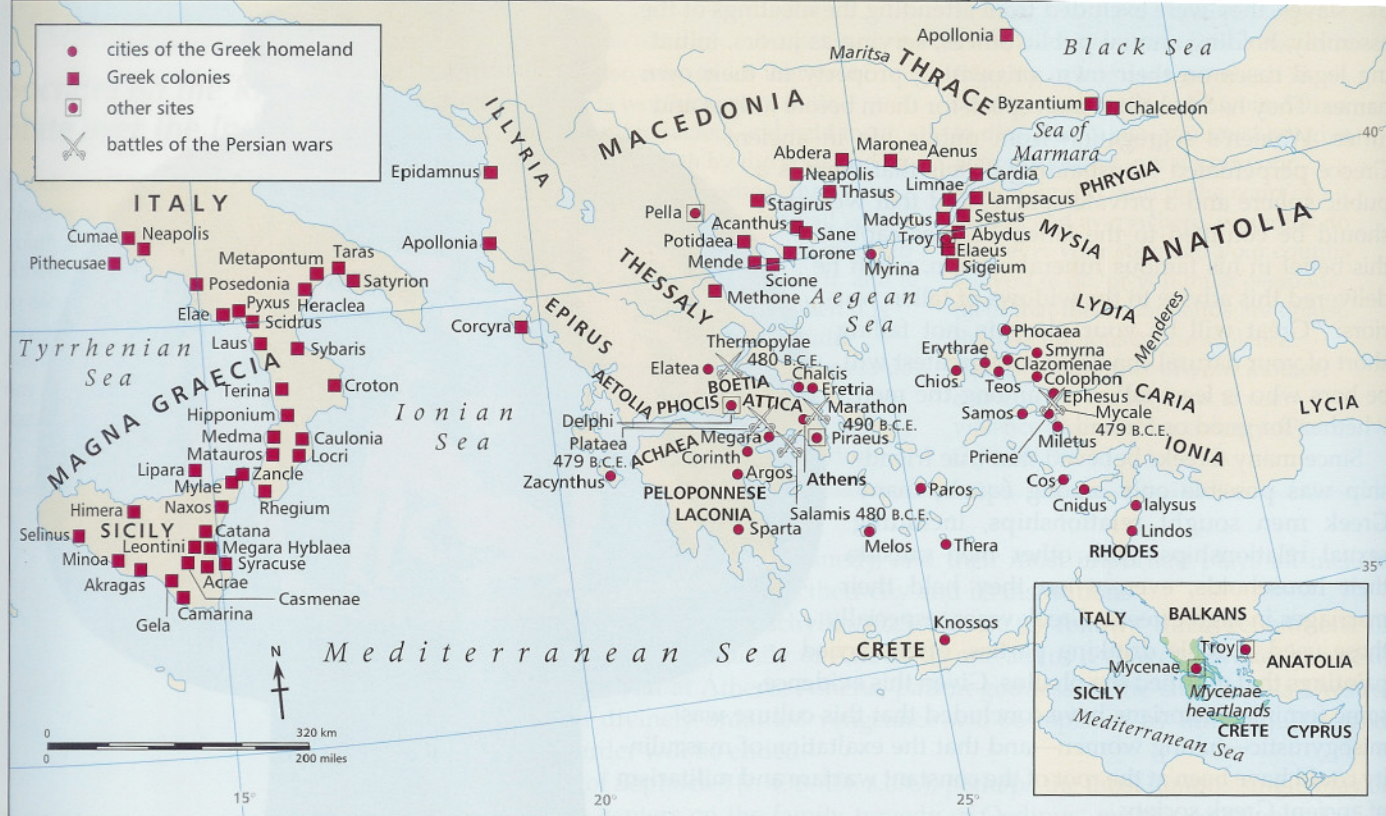
Plato (c. 428–348 B.C.E.) recognized the prejudices against women in his society. When he suggested in his visionary *Republic* that women should be treated equally with men in their access to the highest professional and civic responsibilities, and in the education needed to achieve them, he knew that his ideas were revolutionary for Athens in his time and that they would be greeted with derision. Plato himself believed that men were generally more talented than women, but he argued that both should be offered equal access to political opportunity. On the issue of gender equality, he seemed to remain consistent with his general philosophy: the state should encourage each citizen to reach his or her educational potential, and should direct the most talented into governmental affairs. Plato wrote:

There is no occupation concerned with the management of social affairs which belongs either to women or to men, as such. Natural gifts are to be found here and there in both creatures alike; and every occupation is open to both, so far as their natures are concerned, though woman is for all purposes the weaker ... Now, for the purpose of producing a woman fit to be a Guardian, we shall not have one education for men and another for women ... If we are to set women to the same tasks as men, we must teach them the same things. They must have the same two branches of training for mind and body and also be taught the art of war, and they must receive the same treatment.

Aristotle confirmed Plato's apprehensions, but not his optimism nor his sense of potential equality. Aristotle wrote of women: "The temperance of a man and of a woman, or the courage and justice of a man and of a woman, are not, as Socrates maintained, the same; the courage of a man is shown in commanding, of a woman in obeying." He quotes with approval the general view that "Silence is a woman's glory."



Psykter (wine cooler) painted by Douris with cavorting satyrs, 500–490 B.C.E. Feminist historian Eva Keuls argues that, contrary to the cradle-of-civilization clichés, Athenian society was excessively warlike and women-hating. She finds much of her evidence on Greek vases of the type used in male drinking parties. (*British Museum, London*)



Classical Greece. The hilly terrain and sea-boundaries of Greece discouraged the growth of large settlements, and Greek philosophers also stressed the importance of local community. When population grew too great the citizens encouraged their younger cohort to establish new city-states of their own. The resulting spread of settlements established Greek influence all the way from Sicily to Anatolia.

In practice, Athens followed Aristotelian rather than Platonic views on the role of women in public life.

Even among males, only the sons of native-born Athenian mothers and fathers were eligible for citizenship. Slaves captured in war, and even allies, could not gain citizenship. When Classical Athens reached its maximum population, 250,000, only about one adult Athenian in six qualified for citizenship. These limits on Athenian democracy increased domestic social strains.

Ironically, the city-state of Athens, having led the Greek city-states in the struggle against the Persian Empire, subsequently set out to construct an empire of its own. Following major victories in the Persian wars, Athens assembled its principal allies into the Delian League, with its council and treasury situated in Delos. At first, membership was voluntary, but soon Athens forbade withdrawal. Some cities left the League, usually because they could not pay the tribute Athens demanded. They found it particularly difficult to supply triremes, because they frequently lacked the shipyards of their larger ally. In response, Athens might declare war against them. As a result, "the Athenians as rulers," in the words of Thucydides, "were no longer popular as they used to be."

By 461 B.C.E., many of the Greek city-states turned to Sparta to help them resist Athenian coercion. For ten years, from 461 to 451, Athens and its allies confronted Sparta and its allies in intermittent warfare. During these wars Athens exploited its allies. In 454 B.C.E. Pericles moved the treasury of the Delian League to Athens and appropriated its funds in order to create at Athens a spectacular center of power and authority, particularly by building the Parthenon and expanding the fleet. A democracy at home, Athens was fast becoming an imperial power holding sway over its neighbor.

The Peloponnesian War

Relationships between Athens and its neighbors also deteriorated. Pericles' imperialistic policies encroached on its own allies and on those of Sparta. Fearful that the Athenians would use their navy to destroy Spartan control over its own alliance system, the Peloponnesian League, Sparta became determined to destroy Athens' power. In 432 B.C.E. Sparta attacked Athens, and the Peloponnesian War began in earnest. The struggle was for power, not for higher ideals.

Thucydides, historian of the conflict, portrays Athens setting forth its claims increasingly bluntly in statements of **realpolitik** (power politics). He reports the arrogant Athenian ultimatum ordering the people of the island of Melos to submit to Athenian authority:

Our opinion of the gods and our knowledge of men lead us to conclude that it is a general and necessary law of nature to rule whatever one can. (V:105; p. 404)

Much weaker than Athens, Melos nevertheless chose to resist. When the Athenians finally conquered the Melians in 415 B.C.E., they killed all the men of military age whom they captured and sold the women and children into slavery. Throughout Greece, admiration for Athens turned to loathing.

By 404 B.C.E. Sparta, supported by Persian funding, defeated Athens and captured the city. The Peloponnesian War between Athens and Sparta and their allies had dragged on for a full generation. Both sides were exhausted. Nevertheless, warfare

soon resumed among the Greeks, with Thebes and Corinth now entering the lists as major contenders. Each major city-state sought advantage over the others, and the stronger continued to force the weaker into subordinate alliances as intermittent warfare sputtered on.

THE EMPIRE OF ALEXANDER THE GREAT

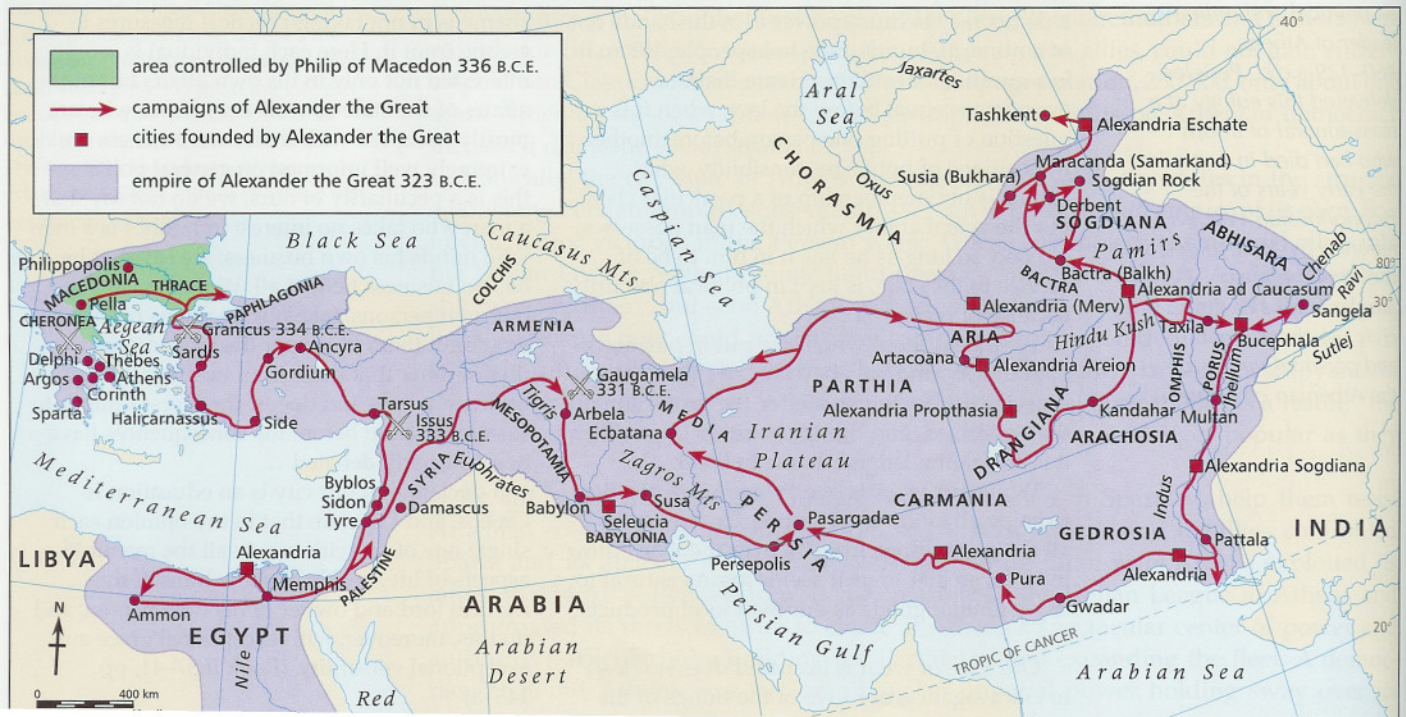
To the north of the major Greek city-states lay the rougher, less urbanized Macedonia, a borderland between Greece and the Slavic regions to the north and east. The principal language and culture of Macedonia were Greek, but other languages and cultures were also present. Here in 359 B.C.E., in the Macedonian capital of Pella, Philip II (r. 359–336 B.C.E.) persuaded the Macedonian army to declare him king, in succession to his brother, who had died in warfare.

The Conquests of Philip

The Empire of Alexander. In 338 the Greek city-states were defeated by Philip of Macedon. His son, Alexander, extended the imprint of Greek culture far beyond its Mediterranean homeland. In a series of whirlwind campaigns between 334 and 323 B.C.E., Alexander gained control of Syria and Egypt and then destroyed the might of Persia. He took his armies east to the Indus and north to central Asia, but died age 33 in Babylon.

After consolidating his power in Macedonia, Philip declared two goals. The first of these was to unify and bring peace to Greece; the second was to liberate the Greek city-states in Asia Minor from Persian control. Skillful as a diplomat and careful to introduce economic improvements in the lands he conquered, Philip nevertheless realized that his army was the real key to achieving his goals. He built up its phalanxes, armed the soldiers with spears up to 15 feet long, and augmented the foot soldiers with powerful and swift cavalry. Philip led the troops himself, suffering numerous, serious wounds in battle.

Between 354 and 339 Philip conquered the Balkans from the Danube to the Aegean coast and from the Adriatic to the Black Sea. To pacify and administer the area, he



established new towns, which were populated by both Macedonians and local peoples. Similarly, he employed many local people in his administration. Within Greece proper, his accomplishments were more mixed. He won some allies, such as Thessaly; defeated the armies of several city-states; and mediated the end of a war between two coalitions of Greek city-states. He was honored with election as president of the Pythian Games at Delphi in 346, but Athens and Thebes bitterly opposed his overtures for greater power in Greece.

The orator Demosthenes (384–322 B.C.E.) delivered three “Philippics,” public addresses calling Athens to battle against the Macedonian king and predicting the end of Athenian democracy if Philip defeated the city-state. In the face of this opposition, Philip met in battle with Athens and its allies, defeating them at Chaeronea in 338 B.C.E. Philip now sought to create a self-governing league of Greek city-states, to accomplish his first goal, and to forge an alliance between Macedonia and the league to fight Persia, his second goal. But he was assassinated in 336. His twenty-year-old son, Alexander, continued his father’s mission.

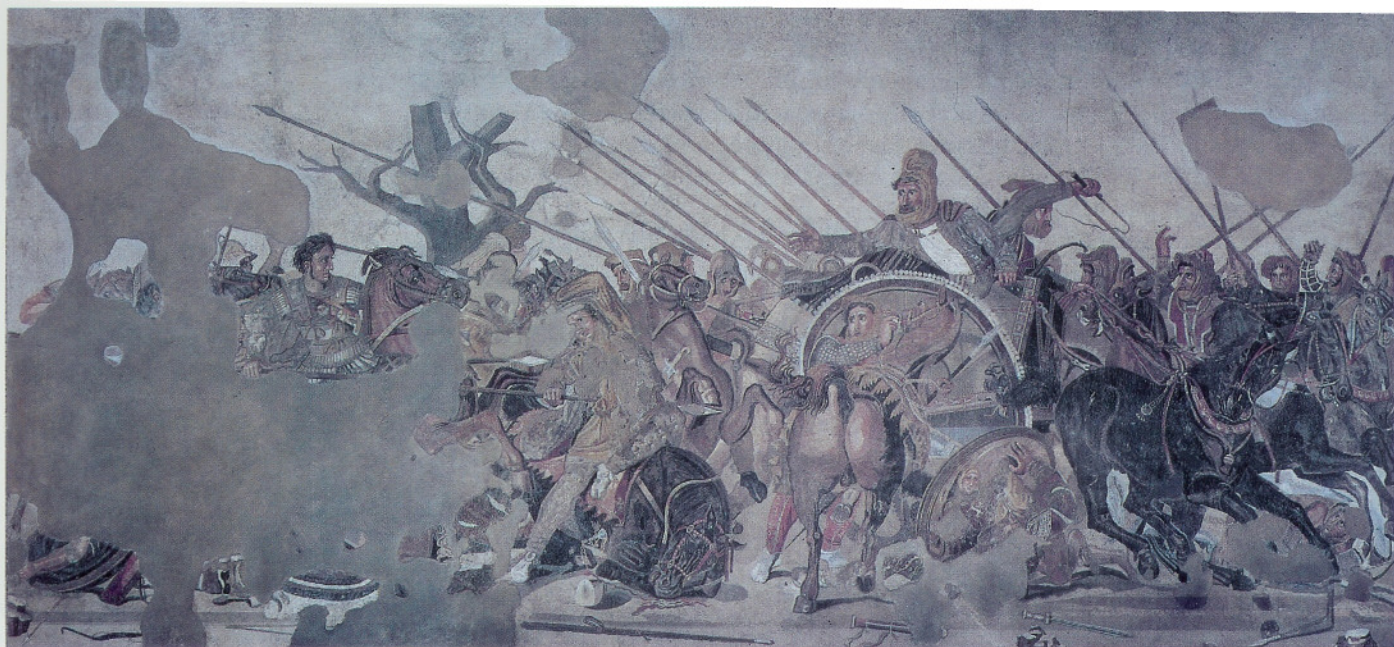
The Reign of Alexander the Great

No stranger to warfare, Alexander had fought by his father’s side just two years beforehand as he defeated Athens at the Battle of Chaeronea. Applauded by the army, Alexander succeeded to the throne without opposition and continued his father’s career of conquest. Over the next twelve years, his disciplined army traversed some 22,000 miles, conquering lands that stretched from Egypt in the west to the Indus River in the east. Alexander’s empire became the largest known up to his time, and in 324 B.C.E. he declared himself a god.

Like his father Philip and like the Persian emperors Cyrus II and Darius I, Alexander (r. 336–323 B.C.E.) followed a policy of benevolent despotism much of the time. But, also like them, he implemented this policy only after his power had been amply demonstrated. Unfortunate Thebes provided an early site for this demonstration. Soon after assuming the throne, Alexander had marched north to the Danube River to suppress revolts in Thrace. Mistakenly informed that Alexander had been killed in battle, Thebes revolted against his local forces. Alexander quickly marched his troops back to Thebes, captured and sacked the rebel city, killed 6000 of its inhabitants, and sold into slavery 20,000 of those who survived.

In 334 Alexander was ready to cross into Asia, where his first major victory came at Granicus. From there he continued southward, forcing the Persians out of the Greek cities that lined the Ionian coast. To make sure that the Persians would not return, Alexander marched eastward through Anatolia with 35,000 Greek troops, routing the 300,000-man army of the Persian emperor Darius III at Issus in 333 B.C.E. and forcing Darius himself into flight.

Alexander continued southward down the coast of the eastern Mediterranean. At Tyre, which held out in siege against him for seven months, he again demonstrated power and brutality, killing 7000 men and selling 30,000, mostly women and children, into slavery. Elsewhere, however, Alexander showed the velvet glove, respecting local religions, ruling through local hierarchies, and maintaining local tax rates. To drive Persia from the Mediterranean basin and to establish his own control, Alexander continued south and then west, conquering Egypt. He was welcomed as Egypt’s liberator from Persian rule and treated as a god by the Egyptian priests of the god Amon, whose shrine he visited. At the western end of the Nile delta, Alexander laid the foundation of what would be for several centuries the most attractive and cultured city of the Mediterranean coast, Alexandria.



The "Alexander Mosaic," first century B.C.E. mosaic copy from Pompeii of a painting by Philoxenos, c. 300 B.C.E. This mosaic portrays the Battle of Issus (333 B.C.E.) in terms of a personal duel between Alexander the Great and Darius III, Emperor of Persia. Darius (right) is shown about to turn and flee in his chariot as the youthful Alexander (left), wild-haired and helmetless, charges toward him. (Museo Archeologico Nazionale, Naples)

His appetite whetted, again a common experience with empire builders once they begin their careers, Alexander moved onward to conquests previously unplanned. He set out to conquer the Persian Empire and make it his own. He marched northeastward across the fertile crescent and through Mesopotamia. At Gaugamela in 331 B.C.E. he again faced the Persian emperor, Darius III, and again routed him. The historical capital cities of Babylon, Susa, Persepolis, and Pasargadae lay open to Alexander. He destroyed Persepolis, Darius' own capital, almost totally. Then, having captured the heartland of the Persian Empire, he set off to conquer the eastern half as well, finally reaching and capturing the Indus River valley in the east, and Sogdiana, across the Oxus River, in the northeast.

Although Alexander wanted to continue into India as far as the Ganges, his troops mutinied. They would go no farther. As he was returning from his new frontiers, Alexander contracted a fever. Weakened both by the hardships of war and by heavy drinking, he died in Babylon in 323 B.C.E., only thirty-three years old. Several accounts report that he was poisoned; some said the instigator was his own former teacher Aristotle. On his deathbed he reputedly declared, "Let the job go to the strongest." In the battle for succession among his generals, Alexander's wife, Roxane, and their thirteen-year-old son were murdered.

The empire Alexander created did not survive two generations. In the east, local rulers regained power in India and Afghanistan. In the west, the Greeks returned to their internal warfare, finally breaking up once more into individual city-states, kingdoms, and leagues. Macedonia remained a separate kingdom and meddled in Greek affairs.

Two major kingdoms emerged from the wreckage of Alexander's empire: Egypt under the dynasty of Ptolemy, which ruled through a Greek and Macedonian elite until the Roman conquest; and the empire established by Seleucus I Nicator (d. 281 B.C.E.), who was governor of Babylon when the empire split apart, and who added to his own domain Iran, Afghanistan, and Anatolia. But the Seleucid Empire, too, fragmented. Parthians reclaimed Persia in the east, and Anatolia divided into numerous local governments. By 200 B.C.E. the Seleucid Empire was limited primarily to the area around Syria.